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## Critics assail fuel-economy proposals as 'minimalist'

Wednesday, May 10, 2006  
Marilyn Geewax  
COX NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — A House committee will vote today on a Bush administration request for more authority to set auto fueleconomy standards, but critics are calling the measure inadequate.

Congress should attack the fuel-economy problem "very vigorously and aggressively," rather than taking "a minimalist approach," Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, said yesterday at a Senate Commerce subcommittee hearing on the White House proposal.

Consumer advocates and some lawmakers say Congress should impose a fleetwide standard averaging at least 33 miles per gallon by 2015, up from the current level of 27.5 mpg.

At the Senate hearing yesterday, Joan Claybrook, president of the public-interest organization Public Citizen, said she issued the 27.5 mpg standard in 1977 when she was a Transportation Department official. That goal was reached in 1985, but Congress has not raised the standard since.

"More than 20 years of lost opportunities to increase fuel economy have been squandered by inaction," said Claybrook, who headed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration from 1977 to 1981. "If the car standard were an extremely reasonable 35 mpg today, we would save approximately 1.1 million barrels of oil each and every day."

Snowe said she and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., will introduce legislation soon requiring all autos to get an additional 10 miles per gallon in the next decade.

In the House, Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., are promoting a bill to mandate a 33-mpg corporate average fueleconomy standard for all vehicles.

But Joe Barton, R-Texas, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, will urge his panel to instead approve legislation sought by President Bush to give the traffic safety agency authority to change the structure of the corporate-average program.